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CLEARLY AND CONCISELY

A DUOLOGUE

By
ROBERT HIGGINBOTHAM

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CLEARLY AND CONCISELY

Produced on January 31, 1913, at the St. James's Theatre, London, with the following cast:—

THE LADY	.	.	.	<i>Miss Winifred Emery.</i>
THE GENTLEMAN	.	.	.	<i>Mr. Charles Glenny.</i>

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CLEARLY AND CONCISELY

SCENE.—*A corner of the Silence Room at a ladies' club. A gentleman discovered fidgetting up and down, consulting his watch, displaying signs of impatience.*)

GENTLEMAN (*muttering to himself*). Too bad, really! Wasting my time like this!

(*Enter a lady hurriedly. She advances with outstretched hand.*)

LADY. Ah! There you are!

GENTLEMAN (*shaking hands*). Yes; I've been here some time.

LADY. Oh! have I kept you waiting? I'm so sorry—I'm not late, am I?

GENTLEMAN. Oh, no!—that is—not much.

LADY. It *was* half-past four we were to meet, wasn't it?

GENTLEMAN. Four, I think.

LADY. Oh! No! Surely—half-past.

GENTLEMAN. Your letter said four o'clock sharp. I have it here.

LADY. Oh, well, I must have *meant* half-past, mustn't I? It's not much past that now, is it?

GENTLEMAN (*looking at watch*). The exact time is seventeen minutes to six.

LADY (*sweetly*). Is it really? Fancy! How time flies—when one is busy—doesn't it?

GENTLEMAN. Yes. It certainly does. What was it you—

LADY. Oh! Let's get our breath first. If you'll ring the bell they'll bring you some tea.

GENTLEMAN. No! Thanks! really! I'm afraid I haven't time—unless you want some.

LADY. I've had four teas this afternoon already. If you really won't, come and sit down and be comfortable. It's so good of you to have spared the time for me.

GENTLEMAN. Oh, I'm delighted if I can be of any use. I'm working awfully hard in the city just now, but you said it was something very important, so I let everything slide in order to see you for a few minutes. What was——

LADY. Oh! How perfectly sweet of you! I know how busy you always are booming things—or whatever you do on the Stock Exchange—you do “boom” there, don't you?

GENTLEMAN. Occasionally.

LADY. Such horrid headache-y work, I should think. Some one told me of such a splendid cure for headaches the other day. I can't remember who it was, but it was at a luncheon party somewhere I think, or else a dance, and they said it was wonderful—the cure I mean. I forget what it was exactly, but I think it began with A or P, or was it F? Anyhow, you took it with a little water every two hours or four—I'm not sure which. Have you ever tried it?

GENTLEMAN. No! I don't think so! You wanted to see me about——

LADY. Yes! Yes! I'm going to tell you all about that. We shan't be disturbed here. I always ask people to meet me here when I particularly want to talk to them. It's the silence room, you know. So convenient for a nice long chat, I always think.

GENTLEMAN. Quite so! Delightful idea!

LADY. Have you a room like this in your club?

GENTLEMAN. We have a silence room, but it isn't used for chats.

LADY. Oh! What a waste!

GENTLEMAN. Yes! No doubt! You were just going to tell me.

LADY. Yes! I *was* just going to. But there, you interrupted me telling me about your club, didn't you?

GENTLEMAN. I beg your pardon—I didn't realize you'd begun.

LADY. Never mind! I'll start again. I'll explain the whole thing quite clearly and concisely. I can do it in a few words if I start from the beginning. It's always better to start right from the beginning, don't you think so?

GENTLEMAN. Yes! Yes! So long as you *do* start.

LADY. I beg your pardon?

GENTLEMAN. Er—yes—much better.

LADY. I always think some people are so confusing when they're explaining anything; they begin in the middle or at the end, and tell you backwards, and they make such a rigmarole of it. They can't stick to the point. Haven't you noticed that?

GENTLEMAN. I have indeed. About this matter—you were saying——

LADY. What *was* I saying?

GENTLEMAN. You were talking about beginning to tell me what it was you wanted to say.

LADY. Yes! Of course! But you mustn't flurry me. You must let me tell you in my own way, or I shall get confused.

GENTLEMAN. I'm sorry. I didn't intend to flurry you—really——

LADY. No! I'm sure you didn't. And I don't say you *have* yet, only you mustn't. That's the worst of you men with clever business heads. You spend all your time hustling and "booming" in the city; and it makes you have no patience with a woman's methods.

GENTLEMAN. I'm quite sure *your* methods could never be anything but charming.

LADY. Thank you, that's very nice of you—even if you don't mean it. But I really am rather a good business woman, you know.

GENTLEMAN. Are you indeed?

LADY. Yes! You don't sound as though you believed it. But I am. I know all about lots of things—cheques, for instance. I know how to make those two little silly lines across a cheque and write “and Co.,” though I've no idea what it means, and I'm sure no one else has either. I suppose it's just a superstition, like throwing salt over the left shoulder. Do you believe in superstitions?

GENTLEMAN. I do in some. Crossing cheques, for instance. But then I'm partly Scotch.

LADY. Oh! of course! They're a superstitious race, aren't they?

GENTLEMAN. So they say—you were telling me——

LADY. About my business capacity. Yes! It's really rather remarkable for a woman—don't you think?

GENTLEMAN. Quite—I should say.

LADY. I suppose that's why they let me in for all this——

GENTLEMAN (*hopefully*). All what?

LADY (*sweetly*). What I want you to help me over. What I've been trying to tell you about all this time—only you will keep chattering about all sorts of other things—superstitions, and cheques, and your ancestry and all kinds of fascinating subjects. These business talks are very tiresome and dull, I know. But I'm afraid we really ought to stick to the point. You don't mind, do you?

GENTLEMAN. Mind, my dear lady! I'll stick to it like a leech—*when* we discover it.

LADY. Well, we're just coming to it, if you'll only listen patiently, and not interrupt any more.

GENTLEMAN. I'm all attention. (*He assumes an attitude of rigid attention.*)

LADY. Oh! but you mustn't sit and glare at me like that, you know. It makes me feel so harassed, and then I get nervous, and I can't remember anything at all.

GENTLEMAN (*turning his profile towards her*). Is that better, or would you prefer me to turn my back on you?

LADY. No! That's much better, thank you. Now let me see—where had we got to?

GENTLEMAN. We were just getting to the point. At least we'd sighted it. You were explaining how your remarkable business capacity had caused you to be let in for—er—something or other which requires my aid. That's as far as we've got at present, I think.

LADY. Oh! Yes! of course. Thank you. How clearly you summed it all up. Well, you see, I'm supposed to be such a splendid organizer, at least so my friends tell me. I have had a little experience—I once got up a concert in the country for some consumptive charity or other. I got most distinguished patrons, all titles, and I sold lots of tickets, and it would have been a huge success, only unluckily I quite forgot to book the hall; and when we got down there on the night we found a tradesman's dance going on in it, so of course we couldn't have the concert after all. Wasn't it a shame?

GENTLEMAN. It was indeed. And now, I take it, you are proposing to have another shy, so to speak, at concert promoting, having come so near to success at your first venture.

LADY. No! Nothing of the kind—perhaps just something. But you do rush on so.

GENTLEMAN. Do I? I'm so sorry. The fact is, I'm rather pressed for time. (*Looks at watch.*)

LADY. Oh, I know, and so am I. But if you would just let me speak, we could get the whole thing settled up in a minute. You must come to tea with me some other day when I've got plenty of

time, and then you shall talk to me about any subject under the sun.

GENTLEMAN. Thanks! I should be charmed.

LADY. Very well then! That's settled. Now let me see, where was I?

GENTLEMAN. You were telling me about this concert you're getting up.

LADY. Oh dear! There you go again! It isn't a concert, and I'm not getting it up.

GENTLEMAN. Well then, what *are* you doing with it?

LADY. Nothing! At least, not yet.

GENTLEMAN. Ah! Then you want me——

LADY. Oh! please don't be so premature. I don't want anything. It's nothing to *do* with me.

GENTLEMAN. Nothing to do with you?

LADY. No! It's Lady Nonsuch.

GENTLEMAN. Lady Nonsuch!

LADY. Yes! You've met her. The woman with the chronic red nose, you know. Of course people *say* things. They always do, don't they? But I'm quite sure she doesn't. It comes from indigestion, I expect, and besides she's frightfully keen on temperance societies and all that—of course that might be a blind. But I never believe half the things one hears, do you?

GENTLEMAN. None of them. But apart from Lady Nonsuch's nose, what does she want? I mean, in what way can *I* be of service to her?

LADY. That's just what I want to know—I mean, whether you can. That's why I asked you here.

GENTLEMAN (*despairingly*). But you haven't told me yet what she wants me to do.

LADY. Haven't I? Oh! how stupid of me. That's the point, isn't it?

GENTLEMAN. Exactly. Yes!

LADY. Well, you see, Lady Nonsuch is simply given over to good works, and so is her daughter. You know the daughter—that peaky girl with flat

feet who dresses so oddly. I can't think why good works make people so frumpy, can you? They say she's engaged to a clergyman in Whitechapel or so nothing terrible, but don't say I told you so, will you?

GENTLEMAN. No! I won't. And Lady Nonsuch wants me——?

LADY. Yes! Yes! I'm just coming to that. You see she's interested in a charity, something to do with anaemic curates, I think, or chorus girls, I forget which.

GENTLEMAN. And the concert—that is—I mean—the—er—whatever it is—is in aid of this charity?

LADY. Yes. The—er—whatever it is—I'm really not sure myself. Some sort of bazaar, I gathered from Lady Nonsuch's letter, and they want some amateur acting as a side-show, and as I've heard you're so clever at all that sort of thing, I thought of you. There! I told you I could explain it in a few words if you'd let me. Will you help us?

GENTLEMAN. I shall be delighted to do anything I can if I'm free. What is the date?

LADY (*floored*). The date! Dear me! D'you know, I really can't remember. Now isn't that provoking?

GENTLEMAN. It is rather a pity.

LADY. Wait a minute! I think I have Lady Nonsuch's letter here. (*Looking in handbag.*) That'll tell us. Yes! Here it is. Now let me see—where is it? (*Glancing through letter.*) She says such a lot all about nothing first. Ah! Yes! The 12th of next month, is that all right?

GENTLEMAN. Yes—I think so.

LADY. That's splendid! Hulloo! here's a post-script I never saw this morning—she does write so all over the place. Perhaps I'd better read it now.

GENTLEMAN. Yes—it might be as well.

LADY (*reading*). "P.S. On second thoughts, my dear, I don't think we'll have the acting after all. Amateurs are such sticks, aren't they? And we

want something really good. So I've decided to get a conjuror from Harrods." Oh! dear! What a pity! Then I needn't really have wasted my time over it all, need I?

GENTLEMAN. No! I'm afraid, if you'll excuse me, I must run away now. (*Rises.*)

LADY (*rising*). Oh! must you really? Thank you so much for coming. I hope it didn't put you out at all.

GENTLEMAN. Oh! No! Hardly at all, thanks. (*Bitterly.*) I only missed three business appointments.

LADY. Three! How provoking! Never mind! *Three's* such a lucky number, isn't it? Good-bye! (*He hurries off.*)

LADY (*sinking into a chair*). Oh! dear! What a tiresome man!

CURTAIN.

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